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ABSTRACT

This publication describes Rhode Island's expenditure of funds under the Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA), compares this expenditure to that of other states, and presents recommendations for change in the funding policies of the Rhode Island Department of State Library Services. A list of major library programs is provided, showing the amount of LSCA money allocated to each program in 1981-82 and 1982-83 and the percentage of total program funding provided by these federal funds. It is indicated that LSCA monies constituted a substantial, but generally declining share, of the overall funding for various Rhode Island library programs, and that Rhode Island is not alone in using federal aid for system maintenance (paying for library operations, personnel, or equipment) rather than specialized library projects. It is finally recommended that the state library agency dedicate more of its LSCA funds to innovative projects designed to serve target populations and less to the support of local library services, library systems, and the statewide network, which should be supported by municipal and state monies; and that the state library agency seek legislative and executive approval to move away from per capita and base grant funding toward formulae which better equalize such aid in response to local fiscal capacity and/or local fiscal effort. (ESR)

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Report of the Comparative Data Committee
State Advisory Council on Libraries
Rhode Island

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RHODE ISLAND AND ITS LIBRARIES

Rhode Island is a city-state. It is not Providence writ large. In the west and the north of the Ocean State are rural areas. But just as Athens consisted of the city and its periphery, so Rhode Island consists of Providence and its hinterland. Communication between the center and the margins is no great problem. Because the state is co-terminous with the Providence Metropolitan Area, space does not have to be mastered in the way that it must be in many other states. Geography is not the issue. Cultural differences are. The state is a cultural mosaic. It is the sub-cultures and special populations with which policymakers in Rhode Island must successfully contend. For those who make policy for library services in the state, it is peoples, not areas, which should be the foci of concern.

Apart from the Atlantic Ocean and Narragansett Bay, Rhode Island has few natural resources. Its capital is of the human variety, consisting of the knowledge and skills of its people. Decisions respecting library service in the state must take into account the nature of Rhode Island's political economy. Unlike agricultural, heavy industrial, and extractive economies, ours is labor intensive and, if the Strategic Development Commission realizes its objective, will become, by the 1990s, technology intensive as well. Individuals associated with labor-intensive and technology intensive firms will exercise political leadership in Rhode Island. Given the importance of human capital and technology to the welfare of the Ocean State, it seems clear that library services here must place extraordinary emphasis on education, on the formation and replacement of those educated persons upon whom the state so acutely depends.

Rhode Island tries hard. With a distinctly modest fiscal capacity, it makes a markedly heroic fiscal effort. The 1984 edition of How Rhode Island Compares, compiled by the Rhode Island Public Expenditure Council, reveals that, at $10,723 for the 1982 calendar year, Rhode Island ranks 27th among the states in per capita personal income. This figure does not unpack the social pathology of the state. And that pathology is troubling. For a state which rates 27th on per capita personal income, Rhode Island has a disproportionately high number of very wealthy people and a disproportionately high number of very poor people. It has a truncated middle class which desperately needs enlarging if Rhode Island expects to enhance its economic health.

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If Massachusetts is excluded, no state in New England, and not that many in the nation, taxes its residents more heavily than Rhode Island. At 119.67 per $1000 of personal income during the 1982 fiscal year, the Ocean State's state and local tax collections ranked 10th in the country. On virtually all measures of tax burden, Rhode Island ranks well above its 27th place standing on per capita personal income. The state's strong effort to support public services is directly reflected in its generosity to libraries. That state largesse should put Rhode Island in the happy position of being able to direct its federal monies toward innovations in library service.

Areal problems having been solved by the state's diminutive size, Rhode Island has devoted the last two decades to establishing, maintaining, and fine tuning its arrangements for cooperation among libraries. The Department of State Library Services, the state library agency, operates a sophisticated interrelated library network which embraces public, academic, special, and, more theoretically, school libraries and is one of only 24 states to do so. The state's municipalities, drawing upon a combination of local, state, and federal monies, as well as private funds, maintain excellent community libraries, perhaps the equal of any in the Northeast outside of New York State. Consequently, librarianship in Rhode Island has a base, consisting of the libraries of the cities and towns, and a superstructure, including the state library agency and the Rhode Island Interrelated Library Network; the Principal Public Library (the Providence Public Library); the five Regional Library Centers; and the Special Research Centers which involve academic and special libraries in statewide networking.

According to the 1983-1984 Survey of State Aid to Public Libraries, released by the Urban Libraries Council in November of 1983, the State of Rhode Island's funding of public libraries, at $1.76 per capita, is exceeded by only six other states, West Virginia (at $2.73), Alaska (at $2.71), New York (at $2.52), Maryland (at $2.41), Georgia (at $2.13), and Illinois (at $2.09). State aid to public libraries in Rhode Island is all the more remarkable because it is the smallest and among the most level of states, with nothing like the mountainous terrain which must be overcome in West Virginia or the enormous spaces which must be transcended in Alaska, Georgia, Illinois, and New York. Rhode Island's striking generosity to its public libraries may be compared to the national average of 89 cents per capita in state aid to public libraries. The budgetary prospects of the Department of State Library Services are again looking up, after some years of stringency. For the period from July, 1984 through June, 1985, the Governor has proposed that the Department receive $2,791,800, an increase of 14.5 percent over the appropriation for the 1984 fiscal year. While structural factors may make the percentage increase appear more sizable than it actually is, the fact remains that 14.5 percent is the largest percentage increase recommended for any department of state government.

HOW RHODE ISLAND SPENDS ITS LSCA MONIES

For the 1981 fiscal year (1981-1982) and the 1982 fiscal Year (1982-1983), the Department of State Library Services produced a document titled Impact of Loss of Library Services and Construction

Act Funds. This document shows how much LSCA money is allocated to each of Rhode Island's major library programs and the percentage of the total funding for each program provided by these federal funds. What follows is a reproduction and consolidation of the information contained in that DSLS publication:

Program	Federal Funding 82-83	81-82	Federal Percentage Share of Total Program Funding 82-83	81-82
Rhode Island Inter-related Library Network	$119,649	$154,752	41.6%	51.3%
Grant-in-Aid to Cities and Towns	$94,715	$94,972	18.7%	19.0%
Grant to the Principal Public Library (Providence Public Library)	$64,542	$64,542	12.3%	12.5%
Grant to the Regional Library Centers	$61,465	$61,465	17.9%	15.0%
Grant to the Special Research Centers	$25,000	$25,000	19.5%	20.0%
Major Urban Resource Library Grant (not funded in 1982-1983)		$7,000		100.0%
Institutional Library Services	$32,068	$28,542	19.9%	19.0%
Library Services to the Blind and Physically Handicapped	$39,428	$36,365	31.2%	31.0%
Library Services to Children, Young Adults, Adults, and Ethnic/ Foreign Language Groups	$39,275	$36,360	44.9%	43.0%
Continuing Education/ Professional Development	$5,896	$3,300	88.6%	90.0%

Unfortunately, the Committee did not have access to information concerning LSCA outlays for 1983-1984. During this period, the Department received federal monies for library construction and renovation with which we shall not concern ourselves here.

THE PATTERN OF LSCA SPENDING IN RHODE ISLAND

The data set out above indicate that LSCA monies constitute a substantial, if generally declining share, of the overall funding

for the Rhode Island Interrelated Library Network; the Grant-in-Aid to Cities and Towns; the Grant to the Principal Public Library; the Grant to the Regional Library Centers; and the Grant to the Special Research Centers. The Department of State Library Services' allocations of LSCA funds for 1982-1983 and 1981-1982 suggest that such monies are being used largely to support existing library services.

Because of the structure of librarianship in Rhode Island, with its statewide network, regional systems, and city and town emphasis, the orientation of such services is toward geographic areas, the large and the small, most particularly, rather than toward the many special user populations - ethnic, linguistic, and racial, not to mention those publics whose needs are a function of age, physical disability, or mental impairment - which impart to Rhode Island its unique character. In this state, LSCA monies have been used to subsidize the status quo rather than to promote new and innovative services centered upon special populations and supported by a system of grants for projects and demonstrations. In Rhode Island, such grants could support innovative efforts at the levels of the Interrelated Library Network; the Principal Public Library; the Regional Library Centers; the Special Research Centers; or the municipal libraries themselves. A substantial enhancement of the Department's competitive Incentive Grant Program could mark the beginning of a revised paradigm for LSCA expenditures in Rhode Island which would place more emphasis on populations and less on geographic coverage.

In its 1982 Annual Program, the Department distributed only $27,309 in LSCA funds to its Incentive Grant Program, the total funding for which was a meager $39,077. Put differently, only about 6 percent of the LSCA monies received by the Department for the 1982 Annual Program went for special projects proposed by the state's librarians, projects which tend to possess that special user population thrust so near the historic letter and spirit of the Library Services and Construction Act. At times, indeed, there has been no Incentive Grant Program and, therefore, no federal or state funding thereof. While the Committee recognizes that there is a risk here, that there may not be the local and state monies to sustain the projects which federal and state funds help to launch and provide "seed money" for, it, nevertheless, holds that the Department must give serious consideration to establishing a system of grants aimed at demonstrating the viability, or, in some cases, the lack thereof, of new projects directed to serving for the first time, or improving service to, special publics. If the revised LSCA, now in the Congress, should come to prohibit the use of LSCA funds for system maintenance, the era of grants for special library projects should truly be at hand.

Of the $403,379 in LSCA funds expended directly on library programs in Rhode Island during 1982-1983, only $116,677, or 29 percent, appears to have been diverted to programs centered on such special user groups as the institutionalized, the disabled, and those of unique ethnic/linguistic/racial background. Thus, 71 percent of the state's LSCA funds were devoted essentially to the maintenance of Rhode Island's existing system of librarianship. Whatever formal prohibitions might exist, this percentage indicates that federal monies have

substituted, even given a comparatively generous State of Rhode Island, for state monies in the support of the network, the principal public library, the regions, the special research centers, and the libraries of the cities and towns. The Committee suspects, but cannot demonstrate, that at the local level, the mix of state and federal monies which constitute the grant-in-aid to the free public libraries maintained by the municipalities has come, in turn, to substitute for what more properly should be appropriations from the governments of the cities and towns. In Rhode Island, the prevailing practice is such that federal monies stand in for what is at least perceived to be a shortage of state money and that federal and state funds, distributed by the DSLS, replace, de facto, funds which should and, in the absence of the aid distributed by the Department, very possibly would come from the municipalities. In Rhode Island, the appeal for funding has been upward to higher levels of government. A more enlightened fiscal federalism might, in the name of improved balance, direct the appeal downward to lower levels of government.

BARRIERS TO REFORMING THE RHODE ISLAND PATTERN

It might be argued that Rhode Island's strategy for distributing federal library monies is closer to the spirit of the block grant or of general revenue sharing than it is to the spirit of the categorical. That philosophy decentralizes decisions as to how funds are to be used. The idea is to allocate funds, on a per capita, base grant, or other highly regularized basis, to the cities and towns, the principal public library, the regional library centers, and the special research centers and then to allow the operators of those institutions to expend such grant monies as they will. This concept has some merit and it is tempting to implement such a scheme in a state like Rhode Island, where the provisions for library service and interlibrary cooperation have a maturity and ripeness not to be found in many other states. In Rhode Island, moreover, the per capita and regularized distribution of state funds of all kinds have considerable historical and political appeal. On the side of history, this is the way things have been done in the Ocean State. On the side of politics, each member of the General Assembly is aware that for each of his/her constituents, a certain amount of money will be made available per capita for library services. Never mind that the Law of Strawberry Jam operates here, namely, the wider you spread it, the thinner it gets. The fact remains that per capita distribution of state funds is politically popular. The problem is that this modus operandi defeats the spirit of the Library Services and Construction Act, a spirit which finds its initial fabrication in legislation enacted as far back as the mid-1950s. The direction of the LSCA is to encourage the states to target their federal funds on unserved, or marginally served, user populations and to be more tightly categorical in such allocations than system maintenance would ever require. Library services have been extended to all areas of Rhode Island, but not to all the peoples of our state. It is to the peoples frontier that the Department and the State Advisory Council on Libraries ought properly to address themselves.

HOW RHODE ISLAND COMPARES

The Committee was charged with examining how Rhode Island compares with other states in its distribution of LSCA monies. Com-

parisons of this kind are tremendously difficult to make. And it was necessary to show beforehand just what Rhode Island does with its LSCA funds. The distribution of such funds is a product of many different forces - the structure of library provision, political patterns, the policy orientation of the state library agency, history, one could go on endlessly with the litany of factors. Hence, comparison is difficult and fraught with the potential for error.

Information on how Rhode Island compares with other states in its distribution of LSCA monies could be found in only one of the sources consulted by the Committee, a publication titled State Aid: A Survey Report which appeared in 1982 and is a product of the State Aid Study Committee of the Association of Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies, a division of the American Library Association. Unfortunately, the data contained in this volume are not up to date, but they are the best we have. This publication covers 37 states for the 1978 fiscal year and it gathers state and federal expenditure data for the following four, rather large categories: Grants to Individual Libraries; Grants to Multi-Jurisdictional Cooperatives or Systems or to Libraries Serving in a Regional Capacity; Grants Contracted to a Single Service Outlet (Rhode Island's Principal Public Library, for example); and Funds Used by State Library Agencies for Statewide Service (in the case of Rhode Island, the costs associated with operating the Interrelated Library Network).

Twenty-seven of the reporting states made grants-in-aid for local public library operations, but of this number only 12 less than 50 percent, used federal money for this purpose, among which were Rhode Island and Massachusetts in New England. Neither New York nor Pennsylvania, the two largest and most populous states in the Northeast, used any federal funds for this purpose, but each allocated large amounts of state money to local libraries. Of the 10 reporting states which made grants to regional or multi-jurisdictional, multi-type library systems for the purpose of establishing or maintaining cooperative services, eight expended federal funds for such ends. However, neither New York or Connecticut, the two Northeastern states beside Rhode Island which devoted funds to this activity, allocated any federal monies for this purpose. Of the 10 states funding special reference or research centers, including Rhode Island and Massachusetts, nine employed federal funds. Thus, while the national picture is mixed, it does appear that Rhode Island is by no means alone in using federal aid for system maintenance. The Committee was impressed, however, with the unwillingness of New York and Pennsylvania to use federal monies for grants-in-aid to municipal libraries for operations, personnel, or equipment. This suggests to us that these states must be focusing LSCA funds on such specialized and innovative library projects as will make New York and Pennsylvania harbingers of change in librarianship.

EVALUATING THE LSCA

Tending to confirm what is implicit in the ASCLA survey results is the content of An Evaluation of Title I of the Library Services

and Construction Act, a study prepared by Applied Management Sciences in 1981 for the Office of Program Evaluation of the U.S. Department of Education. This exercise determined that

> there is a clear difference between expressed Federal level expectations and the reality of Program operations. According to current Federal level expectations, the Program should be predominantly characterized by demonstrations of new services and innovations, and significant expenditures of funds to stimulate and provide services to a range of groups with special or unmet needs. In reality and as best can be determined, the Program is actually characterized by considerable support of long-term programs and activities, and even more considerable expenditures for activities that are at best only indirectly related to the needs of the various priority or target populations identified in the legislation.
>
> The findings indicate that the Federal government has, in effect, become an ongoing source of funding for public libraries. When LSCA Title I funds are used to implement a service, there is a strong tendency for recipient libraries to continue using LSCA Title I funds to support these services. (p. 26 of the Summary Report)

While the Committee cannot presume here to reproduce the history of things, it is interesting to note that Rhode Island's existing systemic structure of library service was put into place at about the time, 1964, when the Library Services Act of 1956, which was devoted to demonstrations of rural library service, was transformed into the Library Services and Construction Act, with added provision for assistance to libraries situated in urban areas. In Rhode Island and elsewhere, the LSCA may very well have reinforced the structural arrangements which it has now come to support, the process having evolved over 20 years, on an ongoing basis. In that process, not to be repetitious, federal funds replace state funds, and a mixture of state and federal, in turn, substitute for local. This is the situation. The question is: Should it be the case? The Committee thinks not, but it cannot, in brief compass, hope to indicate what the federal, state, and local shares of the financial support for library service ought to be.

ANALYSIS AND REMEDIES

With its library services infrastructure solidly established, Rhode Island might well emulate its imperial neighbor to the north and west, New York State. During the 1982 fiscal year, New York received $3.97 million under the LSCA. Of that amount, $1.90 million, or almost half, was distributed to the library systems of that state for various projects oriented to serving specific populations, for the first time or in an improved manner. The states of California and Illinois have also been active in the making of grants to individual libraries and library systems for the purpose of establishing or enhancing service to neglected populations. According to the

Inspector General's Office of the U.S. Department of Education, as reported in the 9 January 1984 number of the Library Hotline, Illinois was so zealous in making project grants to multitype library systems that it used Title I funds, which are intended to extend individual library services, in addition to Title III monies, which are formally directed to library cooperation, for that purpose.

The Committee concludes that if Rhode Island is to provide satisfactory library services to special populations, to say nothing of changing its library services for the better, it must disburse far more than 29 percent of its federal funds to target populations and far more than 6 percent of such monies to the Incentive Grant Program from which the new initiatives most likely to transform librarianship in the state will emerge. More of the state money should be used to preserve the status quo and more of the federal money should be devoted to challenging that status quo, to the projects and demonstrations that are the heart of change in librarianship.

Certain recent developments favor Rhode Island's using more of its LSCA funding to serve special populations. The amended and extended Library Services and Construction Act, passed by the U.S. House of Representatives on 31 January 1984, would limit that discretion which, up to this point, has permitted state library agencies to devote federal funds to system maintenance. In anticipation of this change, Rhode Island's Department of State Library Services, with the support of the Rhode Island Library Association, has requested exponential increases for the 1984-1985 fiscal year in state appropriations for system maintenance programs. The Department is asking for an increase from 45 cents to $2.00 per capita in aid to the public libraries; from $524,000 to $1 million in support to the principal public library; from $324,000 to $1 million for aid to the regional library centers; and from $102,000 to $200,000 in assistance for the special research centers. Much less dramatic increases in state funding would more than compensate for any LSCA prohibitions against spending for system maintenance and would allow the Department to target the bulk of its federal monies on special populations. If the state does not come through with additional money, it will be more difficult. Bear in mind, however, that the state's current support for libraries is quite remarkable and that, in the name of balance and equity, it may be necessary, at some point, to ask the municipalities to make up for those federal and conceivably state monies which can no longer be devoted to maintaining the status quo.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the foregoing, the Committee would make two recommendations:

+++That the Department of State Library Services dedicate more of its LSCA funds to innovative projects designed to serve target populations and less to the sustenance of local library services, where municipal and state monies should be the order of the day, and less to the support of library systems and the statewide network, where state funds should provide most, if not all, of the aid. In some respects, the

Department will wield less political clout by emphasizing target populations rather than system maintenance in its disbursement of federal monies. System maintenance funding is geographic and affects most public libraries and most communities in the state and, coupled with the new Rhode Island Standards for Public Libraries, gives the Department a measure of control over librarianship in the state which would be negated to some degree by an allocative orientation to special populations. Nevertheless, the Committee believes that services to special populations, some of which may come to merit institutionalization, is the route to follow. If the General Assembly increases its support for library services, if the Governor's proposed budget for the Department is approved, and if the amended and extended LSCA is passed by the U.S. Senate and signed by the President, this path should not be difficult to follow.

+++Our second recommendation is of the "what if" variety. What if the Department, for whatever reasons, finds it expedient to continue to allocate LSCA funds to the sustenance of existing arrangements for library services? If that be the case, the Committee recommends that the Department seek legislative and executive approval to move away from per capita and base grant, or regularized, funding and toward formulae which better equalize such aid in response to local fiscal capacity and/or local fiscal effort. Area aid or aid distribution in proportion to area and partial reimbursement of local expenditure, in which the state relieves the locality of responsibility for specified expenditures, are other schemes of funding which the Department might wish to explore. In this connection, the Committee took note of a memorandum to the DSLS and the Executive Board of the RILA from the Northern Interrelated Library System and its Advisory Council. This communication is critical of the lack of equity in the mix of state and federal funding presently provided, and now proposed, for the several interrelated library regions. And while the Committee is not familiar with its details, it is aware that the Rhode Island Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education has endorsed a funding formula under which more state aid would go to poorer school districts and less to more affluent ones, relatively, if not absolutely, speaking. The Regents acted in response to a Swearer Commission finding of unhappy inequities in the formula governing state assistance to the schools. The Committee urges the Department of State Library Services to examine this no arrangement so as to determine whether it has any application to the funding of library services. If so, it urges the Department to make use of the Advisory Board of Library Commissioners, the State Advisory Council on Libraries, the Rhode Island Library Association, and other organizations in the pursuit of such application.

(The Chair wishes to thank his colleagues on the Committee, Deborah Brody and Jane Viti, for their wonderful contributions to the Report, as well as the Department of State Library Services for its support, encouragement, and documentation, the latter from the lair of Frank Iacono